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SUBJECT: ZUMA SUPPORTERS ENERGIZED AHEAD OF KEY RULING

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Ruling African National Congress (ANC) President Jacob Zuma's supporters are turning to the streets and intensifying their rhetoric ahead of the Pietermaritzburg High Court decision tomorrow. The court is expected to rule on a petition by Zuma's defense team that calls the court to terminate the prosecution and remove criminal charges against him. Judge Chris Nicholson is expected to rule whether the National Prosecuting Authority's (NPA) decision to recharge him in December 2007 was lawful. (Note: In September 2006, the Pietermaritzburg court removed the corruption case against Zuma from the court docket because the NPA had insufficient basis for pursuing the prosecution in a timely manner. In December 2007, days after he was elected ANC President over incumbent Thabo Mbeki, the NPA charged Zuma with corruption, racketeering, money laundering, and fraud. End Note.) Police are tightening security ahead of Zuma's court appearance and Zuma is trying to defuse further unrest should the court rule against him. END SUMMARY.

ZUMA SUPPORTERS TAKE TO THE STREETS...

12. (SBU) Hundreds of Zuma supporters on Wednesday September 10 took to the streets in Durban, calling for the NPA's charges to be dropped. This follows more than a week of increasingly aggressive demonstrations across the country where youth wings of the ANC coalition have presented petitions to provincial courts calling for all charges against Zuma to be dropped. Marchers blocked all the major routes into the city for more than three hours, forcing businesses to close and traffic diversions. Demonstrators intimidated bystanders and even forced drivers and pedestrians to join their march. Police used rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse the crowd and paramedics treated at least two protesters for rubber bullet wounds. Police expect several thousand supporters to attend a night vigil on Thursday September 11 in Pietermaritzburg and an ANC official told U.S. diplomats this week that there will be a big gathering on Friday for the verdict and some expect nearly 5,000 supporters. (Note: The senior leaders of the ANC's coalition and provincial leaders from across the country will arrive in Pietermaritzburg on the night before the verdict. The ANC coalition intends to bus in thousands of supporters. End Note.)

...AND TURN UP THE VOLUME

¶3. (SBU) ANC Youth League President Julius Malema on Wednesday warned that youth league supporters would "crush" and "eliminate" anyone, including ANC leaders, who attempt to block Zuma from becoming President. He also claimed more Zuma supporters would be bussed into Pietermaritzburg in order to bring the city to a halt before Judge Nicholson makes his decision.

¶4. (SBU) The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), meanwhile, on Wednesday called on the ANC to reinstate Zuma to the Deputy Presidency. (Note: Zuma was removed from this job in June 2005 following initial charges of corruption in the controversial 1998 arms deal. End Note.) KwaZulu-Natal's COSATU Secretary Zet Luzipho told protesters the trade unions stand behind Zuma and claimed that wealthy South Africans are using their influence over state institutions to bar Zuma from the presidency. COSATU's top Qinstitutions to bar Zuma from the presidency. COSATU's top leadership is expected to attend Zuma's appearance on Friday at the court and Secretary General Zwelinzima Vavi implied there could be a stay-away (work stoppage) if Zuma is found guilty.

¶5. (SBU) Zuma's supporters also continue to express outrage over a cartoon drawn by South African cartoonist Zapiro depicting Zuma preparing to rape the criminal justice system. The cartoon is seen by many as a metaphor for Zuma and his supporters not respecting the judiciary's independence. However, Zuma's defenders castigate it as an abuse of the freedom of the press and prejudicial against Zuma, who was found not guilty when accused of rape in 2006.

POLICE STEP UP SECURITY

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¶6. (SBU) Police in KwaZulu-Natal are on high alert so officers can temper the reactions to Nicholson's verdict. Police spokesperson Henry Budhram said officers will make security a priority as they have done for Zuma's previous court appearances. Budhram noted police want to ensure normal activities continue unhindered outside the court.

¶7. (SBU) Zuma is seeking to defuse possible unrest from his supporters by reiterating publicly that while the judiciary is not above criticism it is a pillar of a stable society and its verdicts must be respected. There is also continued speculation that Zuma's legal team is seeking a plea bargain with the NPA. In the meantime, however, uncertainty over Nicholson's ruling probably will reach a fever pitch with Zuma supporters across the country and in Pietermaritzburg continuing to protest and criticize the courts despite the ANC President's attempts to temper the situation.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) Julius Malema is stoking up the expectations of Zuma supporters by suggesting that Judge Nicholson will throw out Zuma's corruption case on Friday. Legal analysts expect that Zuma's petition before the court to end this prosecution action will fail. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, Malema's suggestion that Zuma's legal troubles will be over following Nicholson's judgment is unlikely to be realized. As such, the frustration likely to emerge when Malema's prediction fails to come to pass, the potential for aggression or violent demonstrations around this event increase.
BOST